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ABSTRACT

The University of Minnesota, Morris campus, developed a bridge program called the Gateway Program to meet the special concerns of African American and American Indian incoming freshmen. The program initially prepares students for higher education through a 4-week summer program that includes an umbrella course in math, computer literacy, and writing, as well as various workshops and recreational activities. Participants receive a full summer scholarship. Pre- and post-course assessments indicate an average increase of 36 percent in students' knowledge base across all subject areas. During the summer program, student meet with the program coordinator to assess their progress, register for the fall semester, and plan a first year of study. Informal advising and counseling are available throughout their college stay. Tutoring options include peer tutoring by upper division students, some of whom have been Gateway students; tutoring by preservice secondary education seniors; and tutoring provided by the campus minority resource center. Upper division students of color mentor Gateway students throughout the summer program and conduct small study groups during the year to prepare for exams and discuss academic issues. Mentors reside in the dorms with first-year students. Opportunities for mentoring by faculty members are also provided. Workshops, informal discussion groups, and social and recreational activities are provided to assist Gateway students with daily living skills and adjusting to university life. Five years of assessment data suggest that there is no significant difference between graduation rates of Gateway students and majority students. (TD)

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A Bridge Program for Educationally Disadvantaged Indian and African Americans

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A Bridge Program for Educationally Disadvantaged Indian and African Americans

Introduction

American Indian and African American students attending predominately white, public post secondary educational institutions have traditionally had difficulty remaining in school and, ultimately, graduating. Studies have shown that a disadvantaged K-12 education, lack of role models, as well as financial burden are leading causes for minority students' low retention rates. Although public universities often have high minority enrollment percentages, retention and graduation rates have lagged below those of majority students.

Minnesota is the second most homogeneous state in the United States. Subsequently the University of Minnesota recruits large numbers of minority students. There is, however, a vast difference between attracting students of color, and then retaining and ultimately graduating them. The University of Minnesota, Morris campus is a small liberal arts focused campus in the geographically isolated region of western Minnesota. This campus, which was originally an American Indian boarding school, has the

largest minority student population percentage among the University of Minnesota coordinate campuses. I was a member of the faculty within the Division of Education specializing in secondary and minority education and do to a sudden resignation, I was appointed by the administration to assist the university's minority student program.

As is often the case, complacency results in unfortunate events. Although there had been efforts to facilitate the transition of students of color into the university prior to 1995, the Halloween Incident of October 1993 was a sobering reminder that more needed to be done. What started as a Halloween prank turned into an ugly racial incident. Although the events of that night are unclear, they served to galvanize most of the campus population towards the realization that much more needed to be done to insure that students of color were successful.

In the early part of 1994 a planning committee was formed to respond to some of the unmet needs of the university's students of color. The planning committee ultimately suggested a comprehensive bridge program, and thus the Gateway Planning Committee and Gateway Faculty Advisory Committee were formed. The term "Gateway" was selected to convey the idea that

participation in the program was a student's "gateway to success." The university's Director of the Minority Student Program, with faculty assistance, developed a program that was originally submitted in May 1994. During the summer of 1994, the Minority Student Program received funding from the University of Minnesota for a pilot project. Twenty-four students were selected for a three-day orientation course. The pilot was considered successful, and plans were initiated for a longer summer session starting in 1995. I was actively involved with the Gateway Program from 1996 to 1999 undertaking several roles including that of program coordinator.

The Program

The Minority Student Program (MSP) is designed to work in cooperation with student affairs and academic offices to provide assistance to meet the special concerns of minority students. MSP provides financial assistance, academic support, and personal counseling to allow minority students to participate fully in the university experience, yet maintain their own cultural identity.

The Gateway Program focuses on the recruitment, retention and graduation of students of color. It initially prepares students

for higher levels of learning through a summer program that includes a credit based umbrella course in math, computers, and writing, besides various workshops and recreational activities. The yearlong agenda aims to provide academic, cultural and financial support and offers assistance to students of color through its three basic components: the summer session, mentoring and tutoring throughout the academic year, and intercultural adjustment.

The Vice Chancellors for Academic and Student Affairs oversee those in direct charge of the day-to-day management for Gateway and have ultimate responsibility for it. The MSP has the major responsibility for the development and coordination of this program. A Gateway Advisory Committee selected by these Vice Chancellors and the Director of MSP also assists.

The Gateway Program is organized into a project aimed specifically towards three overarching goals:

- The successful recruitment and introduction of students of color to the university
- The successful retention, graduation and post graduate career placement of students of color
- The creation of an academic environment that draws faculty of color to positions, that engenders academic satisfaction, and that moves the university beyond recruitment issues for faculty of color to issues of retention and promotion

The MSP has the major responsibility for the development and coordination of the campus-wide effort to achieve these goals. There are five specific and measurable objectives:

- To create a culture of success for students of color at the university
- To help prepare students of color in math, computers, and writing
- To help identify their career goals and majors in their second year
- To assist students of color in socio-cultural adjustment at the university
- To assist students of color in successful graduation

The initial pilot called for a program that began with a three-day summer project in 1994 specifically designed to help provide careful academic advising for all incoming students of color. In 1995 Gateway was expanded to offer 20 students a summer, six-credit college introductory course (IS1006). This course initially met for four hours per day over a five-week period, but after assessing the 1995 summer program, the day was lengthened to six hours and a week omitted. This revised version was offered to 25 students. Gateway Students are provided full summer scholarships.

The Gateway Coordinator and MSP Educational Coordinator meet with carefully selected Gateway faculty

beforehand to accommodate faculty needs and to assist with concerns such as syllabus development, scheduling, and resources issues. Faculty are also provided a teaching assistant.

Recruitment of the Gateway students begins with admissions. The Gateway Coordinator starts the selection process once students have applied and been admitted to the university. University Office of Admissions provides the Gateway Coordinator updated names of all newly admitted students of color. Students selected must meet certain criteria. The two criteria used are composite ACT score and high school rank. The programs targets students of color with a low ACT but high secondary school GPA or lower high school GPA and higher ACT. Students above an ACT score of 22 are not generally selected to participate unless there are other factors that suggest that an individual student needs such a program.

After students have been identified, an initial informational letter is sent. The letter congratulates the student on his or her acceptance into the university and briefly outlines the Gateway program. With the letter is a brochure, which highlights the Gateway Program in further detail. This is a very important part of the recruitment process because it establishes the connection

between the MSP office and the student. After the students receive this initial letter and brochure, follow-up telephone calls are made by the Assistant Gateway Coordinator to determine the students' interest in participation in the summer program. This follow-up is an essential step because it establishes a personal link between the students and the MSP office. The conversation allows for discussion about the various aspects of the program, including the benefits, and challenges. If a student responds favorably to the telephone conversation, an invitation letter is sent. Inserted in the letter is a profile card, which the student mails back, confirming his or her desire to participate in the program. Together with the profile card are travel information and a checklist of items that new students will need, or are encouraged to have. The Gateway Coordinator or Assistant Gateway Coordinator will thereafter follow up with calls as needed. The ethnic majority of Gateway students has historically been split between American Indian and African American.

The umbrella course, IS1006, is team taught by English, math, and computer faculty and covers a wide range of skills in writing, mathematics, and computer literacy to enable students to embark successfully on a college program. The course exposes

students to the thought processes and techniques that are sometimes taken for granted, introduces students to the many uses of computers, emphasizes writing processes and writing as a method of learning, and promotes understanding of math at the entry level requirement. In addition to the classroom sessions, the students also take part in workshops, seminars and field trips. IS1006 course objectives are:

- To bridge the gap between high school graduation requirements and the expectations of a college with selective admission
- To provide proficiency skills to navigate a first year college program
- To introduce students to the process of learning in the college environment
- To give students practice in, and feedback about, their skills
- To prepare students for the rigors of academic work
- To allow students to experience a challenging course of study that is personalized rather that discipline specific

The writing component of IS 1006 focuses on the students' relationship to writing and reading. It explores not only the students' role in various writing and reading communities but also the writing processes and the ways in which writing can be used to learn. Note taking, journals, free writing and exploratory writing

styles are included in the course. Another focus is on writing to communicate, and students practice by producing letters, memos, essays, and persuasive arguments.

The mathematics section involves a concentration on problem solving with real numbers, linear equations and inequalities, graphing linear equations and inequalities, and polynomials.

During the computing phase of the course, students are introduced to a wide variety of computer uses. Students begin with a general overview of computing fundamentals and progress to such technological aspects as, networking, news groups, and application programs. This component emphasizes the computer as a learning tool. The course is taught in a challenging, but non-intimidating, manner and involves extensive use of the campus intranet and Internet to help students to develop math and communication skills. IS 1006 is offered on a pass/fail basis. Students are evaluated on the satisfactory completion of assignments, participation, discussion, labs, and individual and group learning projects.

IS 1006 course objectives are assessed from the first day as students take a pre-assessment instrument in the three subject

areas. In the instructor's estimation, the assessment score is then converted into a percentage of the preexisting knowledge base that each student possesses in that subject area relative to IS1006 course content. Near the end of the summer course, either the same pre-assessment instrument, or a similar instrument, is given to measure learner outcomes. To date, the average median increase across all subject areas is approximately 36%. The early assessment is critical to ensure that semester courses are appropriately selected and to identify areas of particular need. These data are also important to determine if the student needs additional study skills development. Early intervention with academic assistance and enrollment in the study skills class is an important aspect of the summer course assessment.

Advising

To begin to build a culture of success, a careful review of each student's pre-college record, performance in the summer course, and career objectives (to the extent they are defined) is critical. Advising and registration for Fall Semester classes is determined in part by the evaluation of the Gateway instructors to insure that students are placed in appropriate classes. During the

second half of IS1006, students meet with the Gateway Coordinator to assess their progress and to register for Fall Semester. A carefully planned first year of study is also drawn up with specific attention to proper placement in appropriate composition, math and science courses. The Registrar reserves places in selected high need courses to ensure that they are available for Gateway students. This is a critical requirement to ensure continuity and continued success.

An early and mid fall semester assessment memo is sent to all faculty members who have Gateway students in their classes. This helps early intervention and assists with registration for the forthcoming semester. A letter is also sent to each advisee midway through each semester to remind students to make an appointment for academic advising and registration for the next semester.

The Gateway Coordinator, in consultation with the MSP Educational Coordinator, advises all first year Gateway students. After the first year, students are encouraged to obtain a faculty advisor in their selected major. However, informal advising and counseling is still available from MSP. For several of the above-mentioned reasons it is important that the Gateway Coordinator holds a faculty position and has significant advising experience.

Tutoring

Gateway students have a variety of options available to them to help improve their academic performance. Peer tutoring by upper division students has proven to be very effective. Students get help in a number of courses from upper division students, some of whom have been Gateway students, mentors, or have taken similar courses. Tutors are selected according to their academic success and are carefully paired with one or two Gateway students.

The Cross-Cultural Program has also provided another successful tutoring option. Preservice secondary education seniors meet with selected Gateway students at least once a week or as needed. Tutoring matches are made according to the secondary students' teaching majors and the needs of each Gateway student. Personality and mentoring requirements are also factored into the matches. This tutoring program, although voluntary on the part of the secondary students, fulfills, in part, a multicultural requirement in their preservice teacher training, because the matches are always cross-cultural. All of these tutors have completed courses of study in adolescent psychology, educational psychology, and have a minimum of 30-hours field experience with adolescents. It is

important to remember that the majority of all first year Gateway students are still adolescents.

MSP also provides tutoring on drop-in basis in the Minority Resource Center, which is housed in the same building as the MSP. Students can individually contact the university's Academic Assistance Center for help in different courses. In addition to general tutoring, the center has a writing room and tutoring sessions in a variety of courses including, chemistry, physics, math, Spanish, music, and computer science. All Gateway students have been made aware of the services of the Academic Assistance Center during summer workshops.

In addition to traditional forms of tutoring, a small study group conducted by one of the summer mentors meets regularly during the year to prepare for exams, and to discuss courses and other academic issues. This supplemental instruction is considered necessary because some students learn better through group discussion than by individual tutoring. Research shows that the collective cultures such as, American Indians, Hispanics, and Asians, often learn better in groups because of their cultural upbringing.

Mentoring

A critical part of the Gateway Program is the use of upper division students of color, the majority of who are Gateway students, as full-time mentors throughout the summer program. Four mentors and a Resident Leader are selected. The Resident Leader is responsible for the students' transition to dormitory life and also acts as the immediate supervisor for the other Gateway mentors.

Every effort is made to take advantage of the relatively small campus and mentors reside in the dorms with the first year students. Mentors also serve as discussion leaders and informal counselors for five or six students throughout the summer program. These small groups are carefully organized after the first week of the summer program and if successful, continue to meet throughout the first year. The central location of the MSP office helps to build an environment in which the students of color quickly learn the campus and college culture.

Upper division Gateway students are often selected and oriented to serve as work-study undergraduate mentors and tutors throughout the year. This provides them with both an ongoing connection with the initial summer program and employment

opportunities. Additionally, the Minority Mentorship Program (MMP) provides opportunities for mentoring by faculty members. The MMP matches second year Gateway students and other students of color with faculty members to work on some form of collaborative project. Efforts are made to match students with faculty who are involved in the student's areas of interest. Other upper division faculty mentoring is available through the Academic Partnership Program, Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program, and the Administrative Internship Program. These programs are, however, open to all students and are competitive.

Workshops:

Regular bi-weekly workshops are held during the summer program and periodically throughout the first year. The workshops are important for the students' adjustment to the campus, to the non-structured character of university life, to the community in which the university is located, and to a faculty and staff that are largely non-minority.

Popular summer workshops include: career planning, intercultural communications, student employment on campus,

study skills/time management, faculty relations, faculty expectations, student activities, academic advising, undecided major, stress management, history of the university, and cultural discussion groups that include such topics such as racism, interracial dating and cultural differences. Faculty and staff provide these workshops from the respective units throughout the university. MSP staff facilitate a series of less formal discussion groups throughout the first year that deal with survival skills such as financial planning, leadership, and other relevant topics.

Besides summer workshops to assist students in their adjustment, the universities Office of Student Activities and the Athletic Department work with the MSP staff to provide various social and recreational activities. These activities are designed to introduce students to the social environment of the community, and have included swimming, picnics, canoeing, camping, and sporting events, shopping and local trips to historical sites, museums, chamber of commerce events, and the local county fair.

Conclusions and Concerns:

University administrators and faculty who wish to attract a significant minority student population must recognize the

educational disadvantages that many of these students have had to endure. Equally, they should be committed to providing a program to ensure that these students can graduate at a similar rate to majority students. If students of color and majority students are not graduating at similar rates, a bridge program such as Gateway is a possible means to increase their success in both adjusting to college life and progressing towards graduation. After five years of program assessment, research data suggests that these is no significant difference between the graduation rates of Gateway students and majority students. Building a successful bridge program is, however, neither easy nor inexpensive and there are many issues and factors that can affect both the initial conception of the program and its outcomes.

A critical aspect of any bridge program is the establishment and maintenance of close links with faculty who will act as coordinators and summer instructors. Thus it is vitally important that faculty members both contribute to, and believe in, the program. Although faculty were involved in the original curricular development of the Gateway umbrella course, there has been little additional faculty involvement. Furthermore, there is the belief among some faculty that all bridge programs should be confined to

secondary schools or community colleges and that funds spent could be used more effectively elsewhere. There is also a perception among faculty that participation in minority student programs is counted little if at all towards tenure and promotion. This can be particularly problematic for non-tenured faculty.

The accepted routine that surrounds undergraduate education can also hinder the success of programs such as Gateway. First, frequent use of part-time adjunct instructors to teach lower level courses means that there is little interaction between full-time faculty members and lower division students of color. Consequently, many minority students leave the university before ever having the opportunity to work with tenured faculty. Second, instructional methods are still for the most part traditional and there is little or no recognition of alternative means of acquiring knowledge other than those prescribed by western culture. Third, majority students still dominate membership in the competitive upper division faculty mentorship, internship, and undergraduate research programs. This is most probably a result of the first two points mentioned above. Another concern has been the tendency for Gateway coordinators to recruit more heavily from their own ethnic group.

With the demise of affirmative action programs, bridge programs can help ensure the success of students of color. A program such as Gateway can also be easily adapted to include majority students who have also suffered from educational disadvantage. Ultimately bridge programs should be available to all admitted students providing them with the tools they require to meet their educational goals.

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